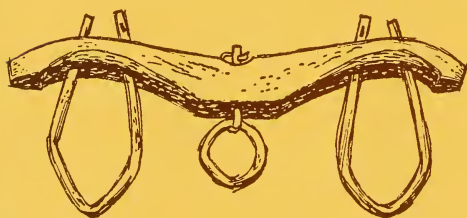


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THE FUNDAMENTAL CREED  
OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN





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THE FUNDAMENTAL CREED OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN





The Fundamental Creed of  
Abraham Lincoln    A SELECTION

FROM HIS WRITINGS AND SPEECHES  
REVEALING HIS DEVOTION TO FAMILY,  
HIS TENETS OF CHARACTER, HIS REVER-  
ENCE TO GOD, AND HIS BELIEFS AS AN  
AMERICAN CITIZEN. ARRANGED AND  
ANNOTATED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION,  
BY EARL SCHENCK MIERS.

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Lincoln Room

## I N T R O D U C T I O N

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**T**HERE WAS so much salt of life in Abraham Lincoln that wherever one shakes his memory he adds zest to one's own experience. More than any other American, Lincoln seems to have something to give to everyone, and the humanity of the man has become a national inspiration. More than any other American, Lincoln seems to have something to say in almost every situation, and few are our heroes so often quoted — and misquoted — to lend weight and color to current political prejudices. The image of Lincoln grows in our minds and hearts from earliest childhood; where once thousands felt toward the man as toward a kinsman, today millions possess this feeling of personal belonging. Like the old carpet slippers in which he once scuffed around the White House, we slip into Lincolnisms with a sense of comfort, intimacy and well-being.

There are books about the books about Lincoln. As though it were a rare and somewhat curious timepiece, his character has been taken apart so that each cog and spring may be examined carefully; and, happily, the tinkers usually have reassembled their treasure with equal diligence. Excellent studies exist of Lincoln as a lawyer, as a military genius, as husband and father; there is a good book devoted to his personal finances, another sanctifies his paternity, and a professor of Germanic language and literature demonstrates that Lincoln is descended from a German family named Linkhorn.

Thus the fascinations multiply. A doctor has devoted a large share of his lifetime to proving Lincoln's melancholy and hallucinations

date from the day he was kicked in the head by a horse; and when a pair of skeptics questioned Lincoln's ability to write the beautiful letter of sympathy to Mrs. Bixby, a book appeared nailing that falsehood to one of the darker walls of history. One needs only to mention any of the places where Lincoln lived or boarded – Vandalia, New Salem, Springfield, Coles County, to cite a few – and books abound to tell what happened to Old Abe hither, thither and yon.

Today to discover any interest that Lincoln possessed for which there is not already at least one monograph of merit is an achievement of no small proportions. To Jay Monaghan, Lincoln is the "Diplomat in Carpet Slippers"; William H. Townsend has turned bottoms up on "Lincoln and Liquor"; to Daniel Kilham Dodge, Lincoln is the "Master of Words"; and William E. Barton has examined "The Soul of Abraham Lincoln" and found it without blemish of atheism, spiritualism, or Quakerism (Barton preached in Congregational churches). For originality, William F. Peterson leads the Lincoln pack; he has taken Abe, and his old verbal sparring partner, Stephen A. Douglas, to demonstrate how men who are dissimilar chemically and physically react to environment in varying psychosomatic patterns (in damp spring Lincoln tired easily, in hot summer he brimmed with vigor).

Each of these books has claimed a valid purpose; each has added to the sum of knowledge; each has enlarged a legend that can give Davy Crockett a running start and still beat him.



When Lincoln first went to Vandalia to serve in the Illinois legislature, the colleague who described him as the ugliest specimen of the human race God ever had created doubtless stretched a point. Stand Lincoln in a brisk wind that would straighten him up and he measured six feet, four inches without the hat; he was thin, bony, graceless,

and, by Dr. Petersen's testimony, his energy and endurance suffered from insufficient fat, sugar and vitamins. Yet if Lincoln was not the prettiest nor the most energetic figure coming along those muddy streets, he quickly emerged as one of the most popular. He met people, all sorts of people, with an unaffected friendliness, and that quality went well on the frontier; he told a joke to put himself at ease (for Lincoln always understood the universality of laughter and tears) and when they asked him a question, he told another story while he thought through a straight answer, again qualities that went well with people who dealt with such down-to-earth realities as the "milk-sick" and grubbing a living from the land and forging a destiny for the common man.

The folk of Vandalia, like the folk in New Salem and Springfield, grew to understand the wholeness of Lincoln; he was a man with a fundamental creed, a man who stood for unwavering principles and values and who succeeded in enunciating his beliefs, even with his high-pitched voice, as though spelling out his own Book of Proverbs. Not all his neighbors loved him, but most all trusted him; not all agreed with him, but most all respected him; not all grasped the depth and the genius of the man in life, but most all wept with a realization of personal loss when he died.

In time Lincoln walked through a chill February rain to the Springfield depot of the Great Western Railroad. Under glowering skies the journey to Washington began. Behind him were the House Divided speech, the debates with Douglas, the address at Cooper Union: all products of the same fundamental creed. Not all the nation comprehended that fact; not all the nation had listened, or had been permitted to listen.

In 1861 Lincoln remained, as he always had been, a man of temperate habits and moderate emotions, a man of quick sympathy and good humor, a man with peace in his heart and love for the old Revo-

lutionary patriots in his soul; and four years of bloody civil war did not change him. In parts of the South news of his assassination caused wild cheering, a reflection of the terrible passion that never had touched Lincoln (or Lee); later the South knew (as Lee realized instantly) and later the South wept, sometimes secretly, sometimes openly, and always with a growing consciousness of personal diminishment.

So today the children of the children of those who sobbed and those who hurraed come to Arlington, standing shoulder to shoulder on the porch of Lee's Mansion, looking across the Potomac at the majestic Lincoln Memorial, and forming on silent lips prayers of affectionate blessing for both North and South.



Some months ago I worked with Paul M. Angle in culling through the great mass of Lincoln's writings and speeches to reconstruct *The Living Lincoln*. One of the best rewards of the labor was coming upon a letter or paragraph that revealed so intimately the essential man. The familiar pronouncements, such as the First and Second Inaugural, the Gettysburg Address, the letters to Mrs. Bixby and the parents of Colonel Ellsworth, passages in his messages to Congress, possessed still a radiant beauty: Lincoln, both a hero and poet of the human spirit, used these prose forms to create his own American Ballad.

The purpose of the present collection, however, is to give emphasis to lesser known fragments of Lincoln's writings that, representing his lifetime, disclose the fundamental creed whence his greatness stems. Of necessity this selection is representative, and of necessity it is subjective: Lincoln is my kinsman, too, and these are just some of the reasons why I am a better person for that fact.

E. S. M.





## I · DEVOTION TO FAMILY

In Abraham's tenth year his mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, died of the "milk-sick." The boy helped his father carry the crude coffin into the woods, and weeks later led a traveling preacher to the lonely grave to conduct a proper burial service. Thomas Lincoln remarried; and Sarah Bush Johnston, a widow with three children, brought kindness and understanding into the Lincoln home. Abraham adored her. In 1851, when his father died, a shiftless stepbrother was filled with schemes for disposing of the family property in Coles County. Lincoln, tigerish in devotion to his stepmother, replied tartly:

Dear Brother:

When I came into Charleston day-before-yesterday I learned that you are anxious to sell the land where you live, and move to Missouri. I have been thinking of this ever since; and cannot but think such a notion is utterly foolish. What can you do in Missouri, better than here? Is the land any richer? Can you there, any more than here, raise corn, & wheat & oats, without work? Will anybody there, any more than here, do your work for you? If you intend to go to work, there is no better place than right where you are; if you do not intend to go to work, you cannot get along anywhere. Squirming & crawling about from place to place can do no good. You have raised no crop this year, and what you really want is to sell the land, get the money and spend

it — part with the land you have, and my life upon it, you will never after, own a spot big enough to bury you in. Half you will get for the land, you spend in moving to Missouri, and the other half you will eat and drink, and wear out, & no foot of land will be bought. Now I feel it is my duty to have no hand in such a piece of foolery. I feel that it is so even on your own account; and particularly on *Mother's* account. The eastern forty acres I intend to keep for Mother while she lives — if you *will not cultivate* it; it will rent for enough to support her — at least it will rent for something. Her dower in the other two forties, she can let you have, and no thanks to me. . . .

Lincoln's irritation with John D. Johnston, his stepbrother, was an old story. Three years earlier Johnston had dunned Lincoln for a loan of eighty dollars. "You are not lazy, and still you are an idler," replied Lincoln, trying to nudge his stepbrother along the only path that could lead to self-respect:

. . . You are now in need of some ready money; and what I propose is, that you shall go to work, "tooth and nails" for somebody who will give you money for it. Let father and your boys take charge of things at home — prepare for a crop, and make the crop; and you go to work for the best money wages, or in discharge of any debt you owe, that you can get. And to secure you a fair reward for your labor, I now promise you, that for every dollar you will, between this [Lincoln wrote on the day before Christmas, 1848] and the first of next May, get for your own labor, either in money, or in your own indebtedness, I will then give you one other dollar. By this, if you hire yourself at ten dollars a month, from me you will get ten more, making twenty dollars a month for your work. In this, I do not mean you shall go off to St. Louis, or the lead mines, or the gold mines, in California, but I mean for you to go at it for the best wages you can get close to home in Coles County. Now if you will do this, you will soon be out of debt,



and what is better, you will have a habit that will keep you from getting in debt again. But if I should now clear you out, next year you will be just as deep in as ever. You say you would almost give your place in Heaven for \$70 or \$80. Then you value your place in Heaven very cheaply for I am sure you can with the offer I make you get the seventy or eighty dollars for four or five months work. You say if I furnish you the money you will deed me the land, and, if you don't pay the money back, you will deliver possession. Nonsense! If you can't now live *with* the land, how will you then live without it? You have always been kind to me, and I do not now mean to be unkind to you. On the contrary, if you will but follow my advice, you will find it worth more than eight times eighty dollars to you. . . .

Lincoln's devotion to his wife is revealed in the letters he wrote whenever they were separated. It may be true that Mary one day used a broom to chase him from the house; but Lincoln was absent-minded, spring often turned the streets of Springfield into rivulets of mud, and a neat house-keeper's patience has reasonable limits. Lincoln loved Mary with a tenderness that placed her comfort and peace of mind before his own. In 1848 Congressman Lincoln brought Mary and the boys with him to Washington. The decision was a mistake, for Mary's loneliness developed into a neurosis, and Lincoln, understanding, encouraged her to visit her family in Lexington, Kentucky. A letter in April could not disguise how her absence affected him:

In this troublesome world, we are never quite satisfied. When you were here, I thought you hindered me some in attending to business; but now, having nothing but business — no variety — it has grown exceedingly tasteless to me. I hate to sit down and direct documents, and I hate to stay in this old room by myself. You know I told you in last Sunday's letter, I was going to make a speech during the week;

but the week has passed away without my getting a chance to do so; and now my interest in the subject has passed away too. . . .

Suppose you do not prefix the "Hon." to the address on your letters to me any more. I like the letters very much, but I would rather they should not have that upon them. It is not necessary, as I suppose you have thought, to have them come free.

Are you entirely free from headache? That is good — good — considering it is the first spring you have been free from it since we were acquainted. I am afraid you will get so well, and fat, and young, as to be wanting to marry again. . . . Get weighed, and write me how much you weigh.

I did not get rid of the impression of that foolish dream about dear Bobby till I got your letter written the same day. What did he and Eddy think of the little letters father sent them? Don't let the blessed fellows forget father. . . .

Fifteen years later, Lincoln was no less lonely, no less considerate:

Mrs. A. Lincoln  
New-York

Washington, D.C. Sept. 20 1863

I neither see nor hear of sickness here now; though there may be much without my knowing it. I wish you to stay, or come just as is most agreeable to yourself.

A. Lincoln

Mrs. A. Lincoln  
Fifth Avenue Hotel New-York

Washington, D.C. Sept. 21, 1863

The air is so clear and cool, and apparently healthy, that I would be glad for you to come. Nothing very particular, but I would be glad to see you and Tad.

A. Lincoln

Lincoln indulged all his sons; if this were a fault, it did not disturb him. His own boyhood years in Kentucky and Indiana frequently had been hard, grubbing, friendless; in contrast, he provided for the Lincoln boys a freedom that often scandalized others. Here are a message, a letter to Mary, and a letter to one of Robert's friends that reveal his warm feeling for his boys — for all boys.

Capt. Dahlgren may let "Tad" have a little gun that he cannot hurt himself with.

Oct. 14, 1862

A. Lincoln

Executive Mansion, Washington, August 8, 1863

My dear Wife.

... Tell dear Tad, poor "Nanny Goat," is lost; and Mrs. Cuthbert & I are in distress about it. The day you left Nanny was found resting herself, and chewing her little cud, on the middle of Tad's bed. But now she's gone! The gardener kept complaining that she destroyed the flowers, till it was concluded to bring her down to the White House. This was done, and the second day she had disappeared, and has not been heard of since. This is the last we know of poor "Nanny."...

Springfield, Ills., July 22. 1860

My dear George

I have scarcely felt greater pain in my life than on learning yesterday from Bob's letter, that you had failed to enter Harvard University. And yet there is very little in it, if you will allow no feeling of *discouragement* to seize, and prey upon you. It is a *certain* truth, that you *can* enter, and graduate in, Harvard University; and having made the attempt, you *must* succeed in it. "*Must*" is the word.

I know not how to aid you, save in the assurance of one of mature

age, and much severe experience, that you *can* not fail, if you resolutely determine, that you *will* not.

The president of the institution, can scarcely be other than a kind man; and doubtless he would grant you an interview, and point out the readiest way to remove, or overcome, the obstacles which have thwarted you.

In your temporary failure there is no evidence that you may not yet be a better scholar, and a more successful man in the great struggle of life, than many others, who have entered college more easily.

Again I say let no feeling of discouragement prey upon you, and in the end you are sure to succeed.

With more than a common interest I subscribe myself Very truly  
your friend,

A. Lincoln.

On February 11, 1861 a tall man stood on the rear platform of the train that in a few moments would start the long journey to Washington. Neighbors had gathered to wish him Godspeed. Lincoln spoke his last words to them:

No one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being, who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him, who can go with me, and remain with you and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.



## II · TENETS OF HIS CHARACTER

Lincoln belonged to an age in America distinguished for the rise of the common man. There was no school or cult that produced this phenomenon; rather, a rare individualism characterized each of its spokesmen — Emerson and Thoreau, Melville and Whitman and Lincoln. Experience was their great master; and their academy was the searching of their hearts. It was about July 1850 (the document cannot be definitely dated) when Lincoln wrote these notes:

I am not an accomplished lawyer. I find quite as much material for a lecture in those points where I have failed, as in those wherein I have been moderately successful. The leading rule for the lawyer, as for the man of every other calling, is diligence. Leave nothing for tomorrow which can be done today. Never let your correspondence fall behind. Whatever piece of business you have in hand, before stopping, do all the labor pertaining to it which can then be done. When you bring a common law suit, if you have the facts for doing so, write the declaration at once. If a law point is involved, examine the books, and note the authority you rely on upon the declaration itself, where you are sure to find it when wanted. The same of defenses and pleas. In business not likely to be litigated, — ordinary collection cases, foreclosures, partitions, and the like, — make all examinations of titles, and note them, and even draft orders and decrees in advance. This course has a triple advantage; it avoids omissions and neglect,



saves your labor when once done, performs the labor out of court when you have leisure, rather than in court when you have not. Extemporaneous speaking should be practiced and cultivated. It is the lawyer's avenue to the public. However able and faithful he may be in other respects, people are slow to bring him business if he cannot make a speech. And yet there is not a more fatal error to young lawyers than relying too much on speech-making. If anyone, upon his rare powers of speaking, shall claim an exemption from the drudgery of the law, his case is a failure in advance.

Discourage litigation. Persuade your neighbors to compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how the nominal winner is often the real loser — in fees, expenses, and waste of time. As a peace-maker the lawyer has a superior opportunity of being a good man. There will still be business enough.

Never stir up litigation. A worse man can scarcely be found than one who does this. Who can be more nearly a fiend than he who habitually overhauls the register of deeds in search of defects in titles, whereon to stir up strife, and put money in his pockets? A moral tone ought to be infused into the profession which should drive such men out of it.

The matter of fees is important, far beyond the mere question of bread and butter involved. Properly attended to, fuller justice is done to both lawyer and client. An exorbitant fee should never be claimed. As a general rule never take your whole fee in advance, nor any more than a small retainer. When fully paid beforehand, you are more than a common mortal if you can feel the same interest in the case, as if something was still in prospect for you, as well as for your client. And when you lack interest in the case the job will very likely lack skill and diligence in the performance. Settle the amount of the fee and take a note in advance. Then you will feel that you are working for something, and you are sure to do your work faithfully and well.

Never sell a fee note — at least not before the consideration service is performed. It leads to negligence and dishonesty — negligence by losing interest in the case, and dishonesty in refusing to refund when you have allowed the consideration to fail.

There is a vague popular belief that lawyers are necessarily dishonest. I say vague, because when we consider to what extent confidence and honors are reposed in and conferred upon lawyers by the people, it appears improbable that their impression of dishonesty is very distinct and vivid. Yet the impression is common, almost universal. Let no young man choosing law for a calling for a moment yield to the popular belief — resolve to be honest at all events; and if in your own judgment you cannot be an honest lawyer, resolve to be honest without being a lawyer. Choose some other occupation, rather than one in the choosing of which you do, in advance, consent to be a knave.

Lincoln demonstrated in a letter to George P. Floyd that he could practice what he preached:

Dear Sir:

I have just received yours of 16th, with check on Flagg & Savage for twenty-five dollars. You must think I am a high-priced man. You are too liberal with your money.

Fifteen dollars is enough for the job. I send you a receipt for fifteen dollars, and return to you a ten dollar bill. Yours truly,

A. Lincoln

For all the melancholy ascribed to Lincoln, his eyes often twinkled. He respected the “small troubles” of neighbors and strangers:

September 25, 1858

My old friend, Henry Chew, the bearer of this, is in a straight for some furniture to commence housekeeping. If any person will furnish

him, twenty-five dollars' worth, and he does not pay for it by the first of January next, I will. [Lincoln did.]

September 24, 1860

The lady bearer of this, says she has freight at the depot, which she cannot get without four dollars. If this be correct, let her have the freight, and I will pay you any amount not exceeding four dollars on presentation of this note. [Lincoln paid five days later.]

Lincoln was modest. Asked in 1858 to supply biographical data for the *Dictionary of Congress* he wrote: "Born, February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky. Education defective. Profession, a lawyer. Have been a captain of volunteers in the Black Hawk War. Postmaster at a very small office. Four times a member of the Illinois legislature, and was a member of the lower house of Congress." Two years earlier he had meditated on his career:

Twenty-two years ago Judge Douglas and I first became acquainted. We were both young then; he a trifle younger than I. Even then, we were both ambitious; I, perhaps, quite as much so as he. With *me*, the race of ambition has been a failure — a flat failure; with *him* it has been one of splendid success. His name fills the nation; and is not unknown, even, in foreign lands. I affect no contempt for the high eminence he has reached. So reached, that the oppressed of my species, might have shared with me in the elevation, I would rather stand on that eminence, than wear the richest crown that ever pressed a monarch's brow.

A note from Lincoln to the War Department respects a human virtue:

The lady — bearer of this — says she has two sons who want to work. Set them at it, if possible. Wanting to work is so rare a merit, that it should be encouraged.



Toward young people Lincoln revealed the warmest side of his nature, perhaps remembering his own adolescent miseries. In verses to the daughter of an innkeeper, and in counsel to the son of his wife's cousin, Lincoln speaks to youth:

To Rosa —

You are young, and I am older;  
You are hopeful, I am not —  
Enjoy life, ere it grow colder —  
Pluck the roses ere they rot.

Teach your beau to heed the lay —  
That sunshine soon is lost in shade —  
That *now's* as good as any day —  
To take thee, Rosa, ere she fade.

Winchester, Sep. 28, 1858.

Washington, D.C.

June 28, 1862

Cadet Quentin Campbell

My dear Sir

Your good mother tells me you are feeling very badly in your new situation. Allow me to assure you it is a perfect certainty that you will, very soon, feel better — quite happy — if you only stick to the resolution you have taken to procure a military education. I am older than you, have felt badly myself, and *know*, what I tell you is true. Adhere to your purpose and you will soon feel as well as you ever did. On the contrary, if you falter, and give up, you will lose the power of keeping any resolution, and will regret it all your life. Take the advice of a friend, who, though he never saw you, deeply sympathizes with you, and stick to your purpose.

The court martial that convicted Captain James Madison Cutts, Jr., found that he had peeped through keyhole and transom to watch a lady undress, and that he had used offensive language to a superior officer and then written derogatory letters. Lincoln remitted the sentence, but first offered some advice:

Although what I am now to say is to be, in form, a reprimand, it is not intended to add a pang to what you have already suffered upon the subject to which it relates. You have too much of life yet before you, and have shown too much of promise as an officer, for your future to be lightly surrendered. You were convicted of two offences. One of them, not of great enormity, and yet greatly to be avoided, I feel sure you are in no danger of repeating [privately Lincoln had quipped that Cutts "should be elevated to the peerage . . . with the title of Count Peeper"]. The other you are not so well assured against. The advice of a father to his son "Beware of entrance to a quarrel, but being in, bear it that the opposed may beware of thee," is good, and yet not the best. Quarrel not at all. No man resolved to make the most of himself, can spare time for personal contention. Still less can he afford to take all the consequences, including the vitiating of his temper, and the loss of self-control. Yield larger things to which you can show no more than equal right; and yield lesser ones, though clearly your own. Better give your path to a dog than be bitten by him in contesting for the right. Even killing the dog would not cure the bite.

In the mood indicated deal henceforth with your fellow-men, and especially with your brother officers; and even the unpleasant events you are passing from will not have been profitless to you.



### III · LINCOLN AND GOD

Politics on the prairies could be a rough and tumble game. One of Lincoln's earliest political opponents was the hard-visaged, circuit-riding Methodist parson, Peter Cartwright, who was not above unsavory tactics. Lincoln would not listen to those friends who advised him to ignore the old parson's insidious innuendos. Instead, he replied in a hand-bill:

#### TO THE VOTERS OF THE SEVENTH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

*Fellow-citizens:*

A charge having got into circulation in some of the neighborhoods of this district, in substance that I am an open scoffer at Christianity, I have by the advice of some friends concluded to notice the subject in this form. That I am not a member of any Christian church, is true; but I have never denied the truth of the Scriptures; and I have never spoken with intentional disrespect of religion in general, or of any denomination of Christians in particular. It is true that in early life I was inclined to believe in what I understand is called the "Doctrine of Necessity" — that is, that the human mind is impelled to action, or held in rest by some power, over which the mind itself has no control; and I have sometimes (with one, two or three, but never publicly) tried to maintain this opinion in argument. The habit of arguing thus

however, I have entirely left off for more than five years. And I add here, I have always understood this same opinion to be held by several of the Christian denominations. The foregoing is the whole truth, briefly stated, in relation to myself upon this subject.

I do not think I could myself, be brought to support a man for office, whom I know to be an open enemy of, and scoffer at, religion. Leaving the higher matter of eternal consequences, between him and his Maker, I still do not think any man has the right thus to insult the feelings, and injure the morals, of the community in which he may live. If, then, I was guilty of such conduct, I should blame no man who should condemn me for it; but I do blame those, whoever they may be, who falsely put such a charge in circulation against me.

July 31, 1846.

A. Lincoln.

In its day an anti-Lincoln faction, stubborn if small, kept alive the charge of religious hypocrisy. It was claimed to be a known fact "that Lincoln was frequently influenced by members of his Cabinet . . . to insert pious phrases in his public documents, for political reasons." The following fragment — "not written to be seen of men," declared Nicolay and Hay, the President's secretaries — probably should be dated in early September of 1862. At this time, faced by the staggering defeat at Second Manassas, Lincoln impressed one Cabinet officer as "wrung by the bitterest anguish."

The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both *may* be, and one *must* be wrong. God cannot be *for*, and *against* the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party — and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect His purpose. I am almost ready to say this is prob-

ably true — that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By His mere quiet power, on the minds of the now contestants, He could have either *saved* or *destroyed* the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And having begun He could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds.

To a delegation from Baltimore, who presented the President with a Bible, Lincoln said:

“All the good the Saviour gave to the world was communicated through this book. But for it we could not know right from wrong. All things most desirable for man’s welfare, here and hereafter, are to be found portrayed in it.”

An esteemed White House visitor and correspondent was the widow of the famous English Quaker, Joseph J. Gurney. On September 4, 1864 Lincoln wrote Mrs. Gurney:

... I am much indebted to the good Christian people of the country for their constant prayers and consolations; and to no one of them, more than to yourself. The purposes of the Almighty are perfect, and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perceive them in advance. We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this; but God knows best, and has ruled otherwise. We shall yet acknowledge His wisdom and our own error therein. Meanwhile we must work earnestly in the best light He gives us, trusting that so working still conduces to the great ends He ordains. Surely He intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could make, and no mortal could stay.

Your people — the Friends — have had, and are having, a very great trial. On principle, and faith, opposed to both war and oppression, they can only practically oppose oppression by war. In this hard dilemma, some have chosen one horn and some the other. For those



appealing to me on conscientious grounds, I have done, and shall do, the best I could and can, in my own conscience, and under my oath to the law. That you believe this I doubt not; and believing it, I shall still receive, for our country and myself, your earnest prayers to our Father in Heaven.

Why had the war continued between people who read the same Bible and prayed to the same God? Lincoln said in his Second Inaugural:

If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope — fervently do we pray — that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."



#### IV · A. LINCOLN, AMERICAN

On the frontier if a man worked hard and stuck to his purpose — always fundamental traits of character to Lincoln — life could offer enormous opportunities. Against this background Lincoln acquired a hard core of beliefs in people and principles that constituted a distinct brand of Americanism. In 1832, making his first political speech, he said:

... Upon the subject of education . . . I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in. That every man may receive at least, a moderate education, and thereby be enabled to read the histories of his own and other countries, by which he may duly appreciate the value of our free institutions, appears to be an object of vital importance, even on this account alone, to say nothing of the advantages and satisfaction to be derived from all being able to read the scriptures and other works, both of a religious and moral nature, for themselves. For my part, I desire to see the time when education, and by its means, morality, sobriety, enterprise and industry, shall become much more general than at present, and should be gratified to have it in my power to contribute something to the advancement of any measure which might have a tendency to accelerate the happy period. . . .

In St. Louis a mob had murdered a harmless mulatto on mere suspicion of wrongdoing and in Alton, Illinois, pro-slavery fanatics had killed Elijah P. Lovejoy for publishing an abolitionist newspaper when in 1838 Lincoln addressed a group of his townspeople on "The Perpetuation of our Political Institutions." Lincoln turned to the question of how Americans could protect themselves from "the caprice of a mob":

... The answer is simple. Let every American, every lover of liberty, every well wisher to his posterity, swear by the blood of the Revolution, never to violate in the least particular, the laws of the country; and never to tolerate their violation by others. As the patriots of Seventy-six did to the support of the Declaration of Independence, so to the support of the Constitution and laws, let every American pledge his life, his property, and his sacred honor; — let every American remember that to violate the law, is to trample on the blood of his father, and to tear the charter of his own, and his children's liberty. Let reverence for the laws, be breathed by every American mother, to the lisping babe, that prattles on her lap — let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges; — let it be written in primers, spelling books, and in almanacs; — let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the *political religion* of the nation; and let the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the grave and the gay, of all sexes and tongues, and colors and conditions, sacrifice unceasingly upon its altars. . . .

After one term in Congress Lincoln returned to Springfield, and began a period when his law partner said that "melancholy dripped from him as he walked." He was often buried in thought, pondering problems that he confided to few. This memorandum, written in July, 1854, contains some of his reflections:



The legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people, whatever they need to have done, but cannot do, *at all*, or cannot, *so well do*, for themselves — in their separate, and individual capacities.

In all that the people can individually do as well for themselves, government ought not to interfere.

The desirable things which the individuals of a people cannot do, or cannot well do, for themselves, fall into two classes: those which have relation to *wrongs*, and those which have not. Each of these branch off into an infinite variety of subdivisions.

The first — that in relation to wrongs — embraces all crimes, misdemeanors, and non-performance of contracts. The other embraces all which, in its nature, and without wrong, requires combined action, as public roads and highways, public schools, charities, pauperism, orphanage, estates of the deceased, and the machinery of government itself.

From this it appears that if all men were just, there still would be *some*, though not *so much*, need of government.

Lincoln lived in an age of a gathering intellectual storm that now has lasted better than a century. The upheaval has taken many forms and assumed many names. Late in September of 1859 Lincoln traveled to Madison to address the Wisconsin State Fair. Asked to make a non-political speech, Lincoln tried earnestly to comply, yet in at least one passage he touched upon the core of a dominant problem for future generations of Americans:

By the “*mud-sill*” theory it is assumed that labor and education are incompatible; and any practical combination of them impossible. According to that theory, a blind horse upon a treadmill, is a perfect illustration of what a laborer should be — all the better for being blind, that he could not tread out of place, or kick understandingly.

According to that theory, the education of laborers, is not only useless, but pernicious, and dangerous. In fact, it is, in some sort, deemed a misfortune that laborers should have heads at all. Those same heads are regarded as explosive materials, only to be safely kept in damp places, as far as possible from that peculiar sort of fire which ignites them. A Yankee who could invent a strong *handed* man without a head would receive the everlasting gratitude of the "mud-sill" advocates.

But free labor says "no!" Free labor argues that, as the Author of man makes every individual with one head and one pair of hands, it was probably intended that heads and hands should co-operate as friends; and that that particular head, should direct and control that particular pair of hands. As each man has one mouth to be fed, and one pair of hands to furnish food, it was probably intended that that particular pair of hands should feed that particular mouth — that each head is the natural guardian, director, and protector of the hands and mouth inseparably connected with it; and that being so, every head should be cultivated, and improved, by whatever will add to its capacity for performing its charge. In one word free labor insists on universal education. . . .

Enroute to Washington to begin the weary, tragic years as President, Lincoln told the New Jersey Senate how, as a boy, he had thrilled to Weems' *Life of Washington*, and in reading of the Revolution he had believed "there must have been something more than common that those men struggled for." In Philadelphia's Independence Hall the following day he acknowledged the one incident which, more than any other in our history, had lasting meaning to him:

. . . I have never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence. I have often pondered over the dangers which were incurred by the men who

assembled here and adopted that Declaration of Independence — I have pondered over the toils that were endured by the officers and soldiers of the army, who achieved that independence. I have often inquired of myself, what great principle or idea it was that kept this confederacy so long together. It was not the mere matter of the separation of the colonies from the mother land; but something in that Declaration giving liberty, not alone to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that *all* should have an equal chance. This is the sentiment embodied in that Declaration of Independence.

A President, beset with the worries of war, gives a Cabinet officer tart advice in fundamental justice:

February 5, 1864

Submitted to the Sec. of War. On principle I dislike an oath which requires a man to swear he *has* not done wrong. It rejects the Christian principle of forgiveness on terms of repentance. I think it enough if the man does no wrong *hereafter*.

A. Lincoln

Where did a President, in times of war, draw the line between loyalty and freedom of conscience and religion? The case of Dr. McPheeters of St. Louis, suspected of rebel sympathies, strained Lincoln's patience — the military people couldn't seem to understand him. A typical touch of Lincoln testiness concluded a letter on December 22, 1863:

I have never interfered, nor thought of interfering as to who shall or shall not preach in any church; nor have I knowingly, or believingly, tolerated anyone else to so interfere by my authority. If anyone is so interfering, by color of my authority, I would like to have it specifically made known to me.

If, after all, what is now sought, is to have me put Dr. M. back, over the heads of a majority of his own congregation, that, too, will be declined. I will not have control of any church on any side.

To the 166th Ohio Regiment Lincoln reiterated another basic American belief:

. . . I happen temporarily to occupy this big White House. I am a living witness that any one of your children may come here as my father's child has. It is in order that each of you may have through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise and intelligence; that you may all have equal privileges in the race of life, with all its desirable human aspirations. . . . The nation is worth fighting for, to secure an inestimable jewel.

A. Lincoln, American, coming to the end of his Second Inaugural, remained unembittered. He spoke words to engrave upon all hearts:

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.



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